



Students Supporting Street Kids



Newsletter
September 2006



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OH CALCUTTA!

In 1997 I went out with Johnny Glennie to work for an NGO called OFFER in Calcutta (now named Kolkata), supporting children who live in and by the railway station and by the railway track.

We worked on projects where the children lived which centred on providing education, and on child rights issues. We also went to help out at projects working on urban and rural poverty that were trying, amongst other things, to mitigate the “push” factors that caused poor families (and sometimes unaccompanied children) to end up with the railway station as their only home.

Johnny and I wrote about our experiences in Kolkatta a while back and somewhere in a back issue of an SSSK magazine (of which the only two remaining copies are probably in a Bodleian Library vault and a secret box file kept by my mum) is that article.

In case that article is never retrieved, I can tell you that the main things we learnt were about resilience and generosity, and our main teachers were the children with whom we worked..

9 years later I'm back in India, leading Oxfam's campaigning and policy work for South Asia. I arrived here via:

- teaching in Japan;
- studying in Holland;
- working with children and young people in the UK; and,
- working for Oxfam in the UK and then in the US.

I'm also married to someone from India called Geeta (though we met in Holland), and we have a little son called Ashoka, who we named after a famous Indian emperor from the 3rd century BC who said “all that I desire for my own children, I desire for everyone”, which is a good guiding principle of social justice. Before he became a wise and compassionate emperor, he was a rather violent one, and my 18 month year old is currently more like the “Before” than the “After” - but you've got to be an optimist !

My work in campaigning and policy isn't about providing things or services directly to people, but about lobbying governments. This is to encourage them to change those policies and practices which increase poverty. It also involves working with allied organizations to mobilise people to demand change. It's really important in my new job that I ensure that the voices of the poorest and most excluded people are heard by people in power, and that we pressurise people in power to realise that they are accountable to all of their citizens.

Most street children want to be able to study, but for many children in much of the world, school is still not available or not free – even when governments pretend it is. Too often they make tuition free, but charge kids (who have no money) for text books, stationary, and even tests. And when street kids do manage to get into school, they often face discrimination and a lack of support. This is why Oxfam campaigns with others like the Global Campaign for Education for free and high quality education for all children.

I think that when I went to work in Kolkata in 1997 I caught a bug - actually I caught several, and the first words I learnt in Bengali were “bad stomach”. What I mean is a bug about social justice. Johnny and I started at the ground level, seeing how current economic and political policies (global, national, and local) are failing seven-year-old girls who have to be the primary carer for their infant siblings. We saw the cruel interface of class and caste, and we knew we couldn't just go and be an accountant in Surrey. So Johnny ended up working for Christian Aid (via Plan, Save the Children, WDM and I think someone else too) and I ended up with Oxfam.

Mahatma Gandhi's famously advised his followers, “recall the face of the poorest person you have ever seen, and ask yourself if the next step you take will be of any use to that person”. That person may be one of the kids Johnny and I worked with in Kolkata – and I hope that what we are now doing is helping to change the systems that have let her down.

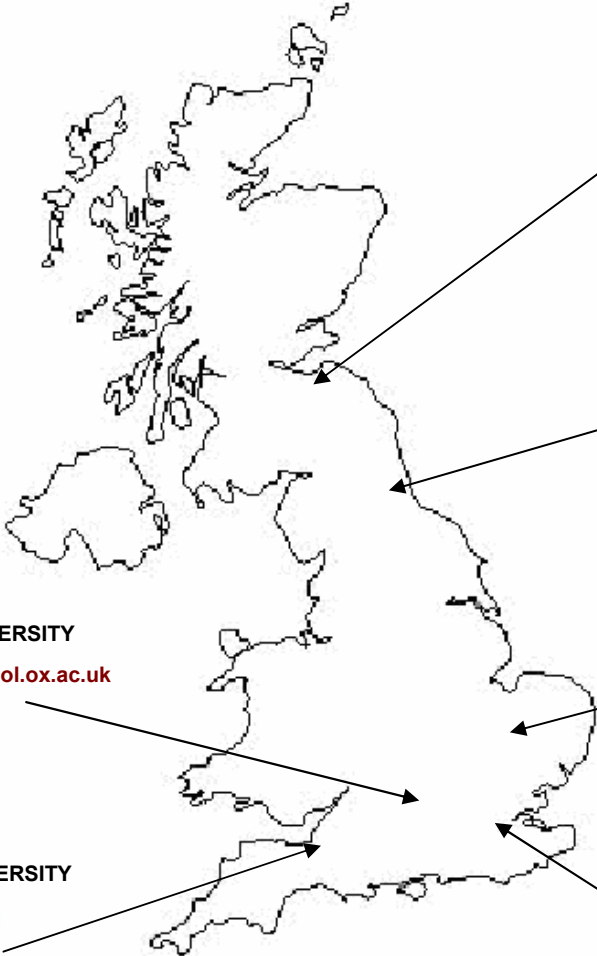
Ben Phillips


South Asia Campaigns and Policy Coordinator, Oxfam, New Delhi, India


Co-founder of SSSK



OUR BRANCHES...




EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

No direct contact details at present Please contact main SSSK address


DURHAM UNIVERSITY

www.dusssk.org.uk
du.sssk@durham.ac.uk

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

www.ssskcam.org.uk
vfn20@cam.ac.uk

OXFORD UNIVERSITY
thomas.viita@balliol.ox.ac.uk

BRISTOL UNIVERSITY

mw3075@bris.ac.uk

ST PAUL'S SCHOOL

www.freewebs.com/sssk
spsssk@gmail.com

SSSK branches are run by students in five universities and one school around the country. If you are interested in joining any of the branches please contact them for more information.

If you would like to set up a new branch, please contact Charlie Bretherton at sssk@sssk.org.uk or phone him on 07989 743889.

BRANCH UPDATE

WHAT A FANTASTIC YEAR FOR OUR BRANCHES!

Are students lazy slobs who drink beer, eat pizza and watch TV all day? Perhaps some are, but the students who organise, run and support the six SSSK branches across the country certainly dispel that stereotype! As well as juggling lectures, studies, sport and other clubs, the SSSK students managed to raise over £11,000 this year: all of which will go to the projects we support.

Not every SSSK branch is the same and money is raised in many different ways. As part of Students Supporting Street Kids, however, it is important to keep in touch with one another and share experiences. This inter-branch communication has proved to be invaluable. For example, one major fundraising success has been RendezVous. This year several of the branches staged a RendezVous event, through which a total of nearly £5,000 was raised.

WHAT IS RENDEZVOUS?

RendezVous is a fundraising event based upon the idea of a blind date evening. Participants pay a fee to join the 'dating agency' then fill in a form outlining what they look for in a partner. They are then given a numbered ticket which gives them free entry to a bar at the beginning of the night, discounted drinks and dinner at participating restaurants plus free entry to the exclusive RendezVous club night that's put on.

Prior to the club night, SSSK branches match up like-minded people. On the evening of the event, participants come to the bar, show their ticket, and are matched to a partner for the evening. The 'couple' then go to the restaurant they have been allocated, often with a few other 'couples' in order to avoid any awkwardness. All couples are invited to the free club night after dinner.

Not only are RendezVous events fun, they also provide the opportunity to raise awareness about the lives of street children through fliers, leaflets and other information. If nothing else, this often leads to conversations about street kids, giving people a 'starter-for-ten' on their date!

OTHER NEWS...

- **SSSK branches are growing from strength to strength and there are exciting developments for the future. Watch this space for news about new branches being set up as the university year begins!**
- **Several SSSK members have been off visiting projects for street children around the world, including projects in Kosovo, Manila and Kolkota. We'll report back on these visits in the next Newsletter**
- **Many students who have been involved with SSSK are now leaving university. The trustees would ask that branches keep in touch with past members and pass their details on to the trustees.**
- **Sustainability of branches is a very important issue. Whilst establishing new branches is exciting, maintaining existing branches is equally important. Branch experiences and expertise are invaluable and we would encourage people to get involved with one of the six existing branches.**
- **Grants are in the process of being made to the four projects SSSK regularly supports, as well as a couple of one-off donations resulting from SSSK members visiting new projects. More news about these will be included in the next Newsletter.**

SSSK GIVES REGULAR DONATIONS OF BETWEEN £500 & £3,000 TO THESE FOUR CHARITIES:

INDIA



Organisation for Friends Energies and Resources (OFFER), Kolkata, India

WHERE DOES OFFER WORK?

Calcutta, India

WHO DOES OFFER HELP?

- Children already on the street and those in danger of becoming street children

HOW DOES OFFER HELP?

- It provides education
- It provides healthcare
- It runs residential units such as a centre for severely disabled children with learning disabilities
- It runs an outreach programme
- It provides safe meeting places for street people where they can obtain regular meals

EQUADOR



CENIT (Centro de la Niña Trabajadora - Centre for the Working Girl)

www.cenitecuador.org

WHERE DOES CENIT WORK?

On the outskirts of Quito, Ecuador

WHO DOES CENIT HELP?

- Primarily girls and very young children who have been forced onto the streets

HOW DOES CENIT HELP?

- It runs a drop-in centre for street children
- It provides training to help working children find safe work
- It runs nutrition and healthcare programmes
- It provides psychological support for children who have been abused
- It runs an outreach scheme



ETHIOPIA



Forum on Street Children Ethiopia (FSCE)

WHERE DOES FSCE WORK:

FSCE works in five cities in Ethiopia

WHO DOES FSCE HELP:

- Orphans and abandoned children
- Girls forced into prostitution
- Children who have been forced into child-labour

HOW DOES FSCE HELP:

- It lobbies for the proper implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- It provides safe houses and drop-in centres for street children
- It provides training for street children so they can find stable and safe jobs



COLOMBIA



Let the Children Live

www.letthechildrenlive.org

WHERE DOES LCL WORK?

Mainly in Medellin, North Colombia

WHO DOES LCL HELP?

- Street children, known as 'echabiles' or 'disposable ones'
- Children with drug addictions

HOW DOES LCL HELP?

- It provides education
- It provides therapy for children who have experience violence, drug addiction and abuse
- It works with community leaders and families to prevent more children being forced onto the street

LET THE CHILDREN LIVE!
CARE FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE STREETS

PROJECT FOCUS



Earlier this year SSSK Trustee, Gordon Couch, made two trips to Kolkota to visit the OFFER community project at Dum Dum. Over the past four years, SSSK have been able to send several thousand pounds to support OFFER in its work. This report gives us some idea of the real difference this has made . . .

The OFFER project caters for approximately fifty children who live on or around the railway platforms at Dum Dum station in North Kolkota. It has been running for over ten years and its scope has steadily expanded and extended.

Dum Dum is an important junction with lines connecting with Bihar, northern Bengal and other parts of India. It is a very busy station as people can get off and take the metro directly into central Kolkata and it provides access by bus and taxi to all the northern suburbs. Many thousands of people pass through the station every day, and some use the trains to 'hitch' a free ride from rural areas to get into Kolkata.

The children who are on the Dum Dum project come from all kinds of backgrounds. ALL are desperately in need. Some are completely on their own because their parents have died, or because they are abused at home and have run away, or are similarly disadvantaged. Others are there because one of their parents has come to Kolkata, either to find work or to escape abuse themselves. Adults may be there because they have been rejected by their spouse.

For all kinds of reasons, the prospects for children who finish up on the railway platforms are fairly dire, and there is a considerable risk of exploitation, both in terms of 'employment' conditions (they have to work long hard hours for very little money) and of sexual and/or psychological assault. Children can be at risk from passers-by, local traders and from some railway officials and the police. They can even be at risk of kidnap, probably for trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The Dum Dum project sets out to encourage children into an educational programme and away from working for money, or from begging and stealing. It provides a context within which the children can go to a free state school for formal education in the mornings. In the afternoons the project provides support and more teaching - both to complement the formal education programme, and to widen the activities to include art, music and drama.



As well as the activities in a typical day at the Dum Dum project, children also get regular health checks. These are provided by a mobile clinic staffed by both a doctor and a nurse. Dum Dum project staff are also there since, as a result of daily contact, they often identify health problems before the checks. Where necessary, treatment is organized by OFFER workers, and some is provided free in state hospitals.

A typical day at the Dum Dum Project. . .

The Dum Dum 'Day' lasts from about 6am until 8pm, during which use is made of the premises given free of charge to OFFER by the nearby St Mary's Orphanage. An associated group from a Hindu religious community take care of the early arrivals, then at 8am OFFER takes over.

The Hindu monks provide a morning snack from the food collected from their compulsory 'begging', and also provide a short morning prayer session on the station platform.

The children are able to shower and wash first thing in the morning so that they are not at a disadvantage compared with the other children in the school.

After the breakfast provided they disperse to two or three of the different nearby schools for whatever free formal education is available. Each child has a satchel for books and OFFER makes sure they have adequate clothing.

The children come back to ST Mary's for lunch. They then receive much needed educational support in small groups; some non-formal education including art, music and drama; and fun activities.

The children have supper at around 6pm before returning to their families or the nearby railway platform.

In order to motivate the children, it is essential that many of the activities are fun and enjoyable, and they include both indoor and outdoor games. Staff attitudes are also of great importance, and they need to build trust. Trust relationships extend beyond just those with the street children. The children themselves must WANT to come, but this is easier if they have family encouragement. Often the mother is the first person who needs to be persuaded, and possible other family members.



Many families do not include a father, either because he has died, or more often because he has deserted the family. This persuasion is necessary because groups and families living on the railway platforms are desperately poor. Children are expected to participate in income-generating activities such as rag picking, selling chai or other food. Less 'desirable' work is not uncommon, such as thieving and prostitution. Families must be convinced that sacrificing this source of income in favour of education is worthwhile. This is a major challenge for the OFFER outreach workers.

The mothers and other family members are considered as the gate keepers for many of the children. Motivation must start with these groups. The teachers, other project workers and OFFER workers maintain a regular flow of communication with them through various sensitization programmes including:

- Focus group discussions;
- Group talks and interactions; and
- One-to-one talks and meetings.

OFFER also tries, as far as possible, to work with the authorities to minimize any institutional exploitation, but some remains. OFFER also provides and funds a 'warden', Ratan, who is a former platform child. Now, at the age of 24, he keeps a watchful eye on the children during the night: the time of greatest risk.



The Dum Dum project is staffed by:

- One main co-ordinator
- Six teachers
- One platform 'caretaker'

The annual budget for the project is just over 1,000,000 rupees. This converts to about £12,500 per year.

What the budget has to cover:

- Staff costs
- Food
- Educational materials
- Clothing
- Materials to promote personal hygiene
- Health care support with bi-monthly check-ups, and any consequent healthcare expenses
- Life-skill training for the children bi-annually
- Two 'cultural' visits per year to widen the children's experience
- Maintenance of a child-friendly zone where children can discuss their problems and experiences
- Extra curricular activities
- An appropriate contribution to the office and administrative overheads

A WORD FROM OUR PARTNERS. . .

Let The Children Live! does not run its own projects directly but uses most of the funds it raises to support *Fundación ¡Vivan Los Niños!*, which is known as *Funvini* for short. *Funvini* was set up in 1994 to be the main partner of *Let The Children Live!* in Colombia. It has been granted legal recognition as a Charity by the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar. SSSK received this letter from Father Paul Walters in May 2006:

I just wanted to let you know how much Let the Children Live appreciates the continued support we receive from SSSK. Although LCL is a small charity, the scale of work in which we are involved in Medellin through Funvini, our Colombian offshoot, keeps growing and growing. We are currently helping about 1,000 children in one way or another.

Much more media coverage and public concern in Britain is focused on the needs of Africa and Asia, than on those of Latin America. All too often the street children of Colombia seem to come at the end of the queue. The ongoing help given by SSSK in raising both funds and public awareness is therefore of tremendous value to LCL, and we are most grateful for it.



The money raised by SSSK helps LCL to support Funvini's various programmes in Medellin. These include:

1. Providing, through a team of street educators, basic health care, food, clothing, recreation and human companionship for the street children. They also try to persuade the children to leave the street and either return to their families, if possible, or to go into residential care. Although the level of institutional violence against these children has decreased greatly, there is still a great deal of violence amongst the various gangs of street children. Life on the streets remains very dangerous because most of these youngsters are on drugs of various kinds: glue, pills, marijuana, bazuco (a cocaine derivative), and cocaine itself. There are also plenty of other hazards, for example, a few days ago a street girl was swept away and drowned whilst washing in the river.
2. Helping to prevent children who work on the street (begging, cleaning cars, selling sweets, engaging in prostitution) from deteriorating into full-time street children. Another of Funvini's teams provides educational and recreational activities on the street for these children, and then makes contact with their families in order to help them send the children to school by sorting out their identity cards; to obtain school places; to pay for school uniforms, books, bus fares and meals; and to obtain educational and psychological support for children with special needs.
3. Helping to prevent children in the shanty towns from coming onto the streets. Funvini's staff provide recreational and educational activities, and the help of social workers and psychologists, for children who are at high risk of poverty, drug abuse, community violence, or physical and sexual abuse in the family.

LET THE CHILDREN LIVE!
CARE FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE STREETS

Some of these activities take place on the street and in the shanty towns, whereas others are organised in Funvini's centre, Casa Walsingham. About 80 children have their main meal at the centre, alongside help with their homework, the opportunity to engage in sport, handicrafts, woodwork and singing, as well as having access to medical and dental care and to the services of Funvini's psychologists and social workers.

Last year Funvini opened a small residential home in which nine boys aged between 7 and 14 are now living. Most of the residential care available to children in Medellin is very institutional, and little attention can be paid to the needs of individuals. Funvini therefore opened Casa Bannatyne as a pilot programme to gain experience in providing high-quality and highly personalised care in as family-like and non-institutional an atmosphere as possible. Funvini hopes to be able to open a similar home for girls as soon as funds permit.

In a way, Funvini is now a victim of its own success because children who might well, without the charity's support, not have survived into adulthood, have indeed survived and now, as young adults, have new sorts of needs. Many of the youngsters with whom Funvini works start their schooling very late and there is little point in taking them off the street for a few years only to throw them back again when they reach eighteen, without the chance to complete their basic education or acquire vocational skills. If Funvini fails to help these young adults to equip themselves to earn an honest living, the charity will lose its credibility with the younger children, and will make them less willing than ever to make what they regard as the sacrifices of going to school and keeping out of gangs. We therefore now have to meet the challenge of helping Funvini provide professional or vocational training for an increasing number of these young adults.

One such case is that of John Esneider who, as a boy, used to sell plastic bags on the street outside a supermarket. He has turned out to be so bright that he has won a government scholarship to read medicine. Unfortunately the conditions in which his family live are so poor that it would be impossible for him to study at home. The scholarship only covers his tuition fees but the course is so demanding that he would not have the time to earn the money to cover his books, bus fare, board, and lodging. Without Funvini to cover these he would have been unable to take up his scholarship and start his training.

I hope that gives you some idea of the sort of work that SSSK is making possible, and that you can see that it really is helping to save and to change lives. Please keep up the good work: the street children of Medellin are relying on you!

With thanks and warmest good wishes to all of the trustees, branches and supporters of SSSK,

Yours sincerely

Father Peter Walters

Director

Let the Children Live



LET THE CHILDREN LIVE!
CARE FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE STREETS

RECOMMENDED READ. . .



TUNNEL KIDS

Lawrence J. Taylor & Maeve Hickey

The University of Arizona Press, 2001

This documentary-style book examines the lives of the children who live and work in the tunnels which run beneath the Mexico/US border. The author, Lawrence J. Taylor investigates a range of issues from why these children have become 'Tunnel Kids', to what their plans are for the future.

Taylor's first point of contact with these children is at Mi Nueva Casa (literally 'my new house') which was set up to offer food, schooling and support for the street kids of Nogales, Mexico's border town.

The book combines Taylor's thoughts with extracts from a series of interviews with the tunnel kids. The interviews are mainly carried out by one of the tunnel kids and elicit some interesting perspectives on street life.

Maeve Hickey works alongside Taylor to produce a collection of photographs of the children who use Mi Nueva Casa. These pictures bring a startling realism to the book, making it difficult to ignore the reality of the danger, hardships and issues these children face.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITE. . .



www.sssk.org.uk



That's right: the website we recommend you take a closer look at is ours! Most of you will no doubt have had a look at it already, but it really is worth spending a bit more time exploring the links.

Here are some of the things you might not have discovered:

- Links to the SSSK branches around the country
- Information about and links to the projects we support
- An archive of newspaper articles and magazines which examine the issues faced by street children
- Information about and links to other organisations working to support street children around the world
- Links to SSSK newsletters and donation forms



If you feel that other information should be available on the website please let us know.



YOU CAN GET INVOLVED. . .

“It’s really important in my new job that I ensure that the voices of the poorest and most excluded people are heard by people in power, and that we pressurise people in power to realise that they are accountable to all of their citizens.”

Ben Phillips

South Asia Campaigns and Policy Coordinator, Oxfam, New Delhi, India

Co-founder of SSSK

SSSK isn’t just about making money to support street children around the world. It is also committed to raising awareness about the causes and effects of life on the street.

Ben Phillips and Johnny Glennie spent time working side-by-side with street children in Calcutta. When they came back to the UK they could have decided simply to send money each month to OFFER, for whom they worked. Instead, they set up SSSK and told other people about their experiences. As a direct result of this, we now have six SSSK branches across the UK, with more anticipated in the future, and we are able to send around £10,000 to various projects each year.

Every time an SSSK branch holds an event it raises awareness about the issues affecting street children. As Father Peter’s letter shows, the money raised is of course extremely important, but it is equally important that SSSK succeeds in getting people talking and thinking about why so many children are forced to live on the streets.

If you are reading this now then you probably already support SSSK in some way. What we would ask is that you help us raise awareness amongst other people. Copies of this newsletter can be downloaded from the website, www.sssk.org.uk, or sent to you by contacting us on sssk@sssk.org.uk. If you can think of anyone who might be interested in our work, please pass a copy on to them.

Of course, financial contributions are still important. Each year, as a result of the money raised by branches and that donated by individual supporters, we are able to send around £10,000 to the four projects described in this newsletter. If you, or any of your friends and family, would like to make a donation to SSSK please visit www.sssk.org.uk for details (forms are available to download in the ‘Contact Us’ section) or contact Kate Bretherton on kate.bretherton@gmail.com or 07866 549501.

***THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR CONTINUED
SUPPORT***